

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP:  
A LOOK AT LEADERSHIP EDUCATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis

by

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## ABSTRACT

With the Millennials' coming of age, there are now up to four generations in academia at one time. With these changing demographics come a change in preferred leadership styles and traits among colleagues and students. There is little research regarding faculty's, leadership educators specifically, preferred leadership traits. Additionally, though research exists on Millennial students, research is lacking on perceptions of these students by their educators.

In this study, an online survey was sent to 320 members of the Association of Leadership Educators asking respondents to rank-order ten leadership traits based on importance in an effective leader as well as rank order the same leadership traits for prevalence in their students. The survey also contained basic demographic questions, such as year of birth, rank, and department. After removing incomplete responses, a total of 57 responses were separated into Baby Boomers and Xers then analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were ran and the leadership traits were ranked based on mean.

This study found that Baby Boomers value honest (2.43), competent (3.90), and inspiring (4.15) as most important in an effective leader. Xers were found to value competent (3.55), honest (3.70), and inspiring (4.50) as the most important leadership

traits. Loyalty, an trait that research has found to be important to both of these generations, was ranked ninth and tenth by Baby Boomers and Xers respectively.

This study also found that the same leadership educators believed their students, who represent the Millennial generation, embody the leadership traits of determined (4.07), ambitious (4.16), honest (4.35) most often. Competency, a leadership trait that respondents ranked as highly important in effective leaders, was only ranked as the fifth most prevalent trait in students. Research characterizes Millennials as high-achieving and ambitious, which this study found to be true.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends who encouraged me to never give up, even when times were tough. For that encouragement, I will always be thankful.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first thank my committee chair, Dr. Jen Williams, for always encouraging me and lifting my spirits, even when I thought it was time to give up. I'll never forget the laughs (and tears) that came from our meetings. I would also like to thank Dr. Robert Strong for being my voice of reason, always keeping me honest. I never could have expected a trip to Trinidad to turn into a lifelong friendship. Finally, to Dr. Peck Parrott, thank you for introducing me to wonderfulness that is generational cohort theory. I still remember sitting in Dr. Welch's class listening to your presentation about generational differences and knowing then that I had found the basis for my thesis.

I would also like to thank all of the friends I have made during both my undergraduate and graduate school. Jennifer, thank you for helping me get through this thesis by offering advice and even seeking out answers when we both were at a loss. Cassidy and Alane, thank you both for listening to all of my stories from the craziness that comes with being in graduate school and always offering to meet for a girl's night. Thank you to Molly and Natalie for being the best friends a girl could ask for over the past six years. You'll never know just how much you mean to me. And to Thomas, thank you for always encouraging me and reminding me that I was smart enough to get through my program, even when I sometimes disagreed.

Thank you to my new work family – Cady, Michaela, and everyone in the Vice Chancellors and Dean’s office. You have been so supportive of me in finishing this chapter of my life so that I can continue on to the next. Also, thank you to Mark Mielke and my Money Wise Aggie family for your continual encouragement through this long process.

I believe I have saved the best thank-you for last. I want to thank my family for being supportive of my dream to continue my education. You may not have known exactly what I was talking about each time I called excited or upset about the process of writing my thesis, but you listened anyway. It is because of each of you, Momma, Daddy, and Shelbie, that I am the person I am today.

I love each and every one of you!

## NOMENCLATURE

Baby Boomers	the generation born between 1944 and 1960 (Zemke et al., 2000).
Effective leader	someone that has the ability to influence a group of individuals towards the achievement of a particular goal (Drouillard & Kleiner, 1996; Kotter, 1990; Montgomery, 1961; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1961).
GDLQ	Generational Differences Leadership Question – Instrument modified from Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) Checklist of Admired Leaders.
Generation	a group of the same age in a similar social location, experiencing similar social events (Mannheim, 1972; Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007).
Generation X	the generation born between 1961 and 1980 (Zemke et al., 2000).
Millennials	the youngest generation in higher education, born between 1981-2000 (Zemke et al., 2000).
Veterans	the eldest generation still living, born between 1922 and 1943 (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000).

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Within higher education, diversity continues to grow and drastically change demographics, including ethnicity, religion, and age. This change of demographics extends to both faculty members and student populations. Though universities emphasize the understanding and acceptance of diversity, generational diversity is a factor that does not receive as much attention. With the Millennial generation's coming of age, it is possible for up to four different generations to be present in the realm of academia. Faculty must not only deal with generational diversity among their colleagues, but also among their students. "The changing demographics of the U.S. population (and of other nations) has quietly but profoundly begun to pull higher education in different directions and to cause the introduction of new academic programs, practices, and personnel policies" (Keller, 2001, p. 234). This changing of demographics among educators and student populations creates uncharted territory for educators to maneuver in both a professional and personal manner to both collaborate with colleagues of different generations as well as engage students of a younger generation.

The Pew Research Center (2010) found that in 2011, there were 55.4 million Millennials in the United States population and 39% of those Millennials were still in college, high school, or a trade school. "So far only about one-in-five Millennials (19%) are college

graduates. An additional 26% are currently in school and plan to graduate from college, while an additional 30% are not in school but expect to someday earn a college degree” (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 41). It is evident that faculty have several years left with the Millennial generation, which means understanding this generation and their behaviors is of utmost importance. Leadership educators must understand both the differences in opinions of effective leaders among the Baby Boomer and X generations and how the Millennial generation fits in.

### **Background and Purpose**

With multiple generations in higher education come multiple preferred leadership styles and leadership traits. Current business trends suggest multigenerational leadership— a movement to lead based on the shared values of all ages— will increasingly become the norm, increasing the importance of understanding the differences in generations and leadership (Cufaude & Riemersma, 1999; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999). With an increase in multigenerational top management teams, organizations must not only understand generational differences, but also effectively leverage these differences to prosper (Kabacoff & Stoffey, 2001). This rings true for higher education as well. Faculty must learn to leverage generational differences among both colleagues and students to create a cohesive environment of understanding and collaborate more effectively.

Another consideration for faculty is Millennials are not just in the classroom anymore. With the median age of those receiving a doctorate at 33, “today’s Millennial students – whether possessed of greatness, distracted, narcissistic, or none-of-the-above – will shortly be tomorrow’s colleagues in the teaching profession itself” (Wilson & Gerber, 2008, p. 40). The first college graduates of this generation completed college in 2003 and are now showing up on campuses in administrative ranks, entry-level positions, and as faculty members (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). The Millennials that are being taught right now will soon be the leadership professionals that educators will collaborate with in the future. These demographics suggest the importance of understanding what leadership traits Millennials will bring to the table in both the classroom and the workplace.

Although studies show the usefulness in understanding and taking advantage of generational differences, there are many misconceptions about generations that keep leaders and researchers from further exploring the differences in generations. The main misconception is the belief that “people change their values, attitudes, and preferences as a function of age” (Arsenault, 2004, p. 125). However, research has found that generation’s preferences are life-long effects and do not change based on age alone (Schewe & Meredith, 1994). Lack of empirical research that validates generational differences has led to misunderstandings and a lack of appreciation for these differences. Increasing the amount of research dedicated to understanding the differences in

leadership preferences among generations in higher education will aid faculty in dealing with other faculty members and in the classroom with their students.

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

This study will identify common preferred leadership traits of leadership educators belonging to the Baby Boomer and X generations and determine if a relationship between their preferences and their generation exists. The study will also identify leadership traits educators believe their undergraduate students possess. The study will answer the following research questions:

1. Utilizing the Generational Differences in Leadership Questionnaire (GDLQ), how do Baby Boomer and X generations of leadership educators rank characteristics of effective leaders?
2. Utilizing the GDLQ, what leadership characteristics do leadership educators identify in their undergraduate students?

### **Limitations**

The major limitation of this study was the low response rate of 17.81%. Response rate is a critical concern for scholars who seek dependable, valid and reliable results (Hair, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2007; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill; 2006). The low response rate was a result of time of year of data collection. Data collection began at the end of spring semester and continued through summer. During this time of year, many faculty members are out of the office. The last reminder email containing the survey

was sent a week after the start of fall semester at a more opportune time to increase the number of responses. Unfortunately, the number of responses remained low.

Another limitation of this study was the use of self-reported data. Caution must always be shown when using self-reported data. My sample was limited to the Association of Leadership Educators and although these members are from across the country, it is still only a small sample of the larger population of leadership educators. The survey was also sent out by email and there is no way to actually track whether or not the respondent is the leadership educator that the email address belongs to.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Generations**

A generation is best defined as a group of the same age in a similar social location, experiencing similar social events (Mannheim, 1972; Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal & Brown, 2007). People of the same age group tend to experience similar social and historical processes, “predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience and a characteristic type of historically relevant action” (Sessa et al., 2007, p. 49). These life experiences tend to distinguish one cohort from another, hence Generational Cohort Theory.

Because Generational Cohort Theory is defined by social change, six characteristics help determine the scope of a generation:

(1) a traumatic or formative event such as a war, (2) a dramatic shift in demography that influences the distribution of resources in a society, (3) an interval that connects a generation to success or failure (e.g., the Great Depression), (4) the creation of a ‘sacred space’ that sustains a collective memory (e.g., Woodstock), (5) mentors or heroes that give impetus and voice by their work (e.g., Martin Luther King), and (6) the work of people who know and support each other (e.g., Bill Gates, Steven Jobs)” (Sessa et al., 2007, p. 49).



There is a debate between researchers on how to best divide and name the generations in our country. For the purpose of this study, Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2000)'s generation break-down will be used. The eldest generation still living is the Veterans, or the Silent Generation, born from 1922-1943. Their core values include dedication, hard work, respect for authority and their defining moments are the Great Depression, WW II, and FDR (Arsenault, 2004; Zemke et al., 2000). The next generation is the Baby Boomers born from 1944-1960. Their core values include optimism, personal gratification, growth and their defining moments are JFK, civil rights, and women's movements. Then there is Generation X born from 1961-1980 who value diversity, technoliteracy, fun, and informality. Their defining moments are the Challenger incident, AIDS, and Rodney King. The youngest generation in higher education is the Millennials, also known as the Nexters or Gen Y, born from 1981-2000. This generation values optimism, civic duty, confidence, achievement and their defining moments include 9/11, Oklahoma City bombing, and computers.

Research has found that the cusp effect and the crossover effect to be major reasons for the lack of mutual exclusivity between generations. The cusp effect refers to the lack of mutual exclusivity between generations, meaning people are born at the beginning and end of generations and can relate to more than one generation (Arsenault, 2004).

Schewe and Evans (2000) defined the crossover effect as very significant events that effect every generation, such as John F. Kennedy's assassination, the Challenger incident, and the movie *Gone with the Wind*. Though some may say that the cusp and

crossover effects take away from generational differences, Arsenault (2004) states “instead the effects can be used positively for example to show that there is common ground and a feeling of connectedness among generations, especially in seminars or training sessions” (p. 136). The cusp and crossover effects can unify generations by emphasizing commonalities that span every generation.

## **Leadership Behaviors**

### *Differences in Behaviors*

It comes as no surprise that different generations value different leadership characteristics. Sessa et al. (2007) found the Millennial Generation ranked dedicated as the most important attribute and credible as less important, which differed from all other generations. The study also found the attribute of delegating most clearly differentiated the Millennials from other cohorts, whereas Gen-Xers valued attributes that suggested an optimistic leader with experience. Xers also prefer flexibility, money and benefits, harmonious work environments, and fulfillment (Joyner, 2000). In a study comparing Baby Boomers and Xers, it was found that Xers differed from the Baby Boomers in that they prefer challenging tasks accomplished within a workday versus several workdays; surfing and buying using the internet versus the telephone; flexible work hours versus regularly scheduled hours; and a portable 401K with lump sum distribution versus a retirement plan with benefits (Rodriguez, Green, & Ree, 2003).

As with leadership characteristics, generations differ in their preferred leadership style. Leadership styles are shaped by differences in attitudes, values, and beliefs (Zemke et al., 2000). Veterans prefer a directive leadership style that is simple and clear (Arsenault, 2004; Conger, 2001; and Zemke et al., 2000). Baby Boomers prefer a collegial and consensual style, while Xers tend to be fair, competent, and straightforward. Millennials prefer a polite relationship with authority.

### *Similarities in Behaviors*

Though leadership behaviors and preferences differ among generations, there are also similarities. In a study by Arsenault (2004), every generation was found to believe honesty is the most important characteristic for leaders to possess. This result means all generations value leaders who tell the truth and do not mislead their employees. In the same study, an additional finding was each generation ranked competence and loyalty high on the list of admired leadership traits, meaning each “felt that a successful leader must be capable, effective and know what he or she is doing and promote high levels of loyalty” (p. 136).

## **Leadership in Higher Education**

The culture of higher education is shifting due to changing student demographics (Hurtado & Dey, 1997), focus on student-centered learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995), and an increasing impact of technology on faculty roles (Baldwin, 1998). With these changes in higher education, the leadership paradigm is also in a state of change. “Universities are

moving from being stable environments where management is sufficient to be efficient, to dynamic ‘businesses’ where leadership will be needed to survive” (Davies, Hides, & Casey, 2001, p. 1028). In a study by Murry and Stauffacher (2001) of perceptions of what makes for effectiveness in heads of departments in higher education, trust and integrity issues were found to be important. Bryman (2008) found that “there is evidence that effective departmental leaders form role models for members of their staff, so that it is important for them to have credibility as academics as well as in terms of being leaders” ( p.701). In a study by Spendlove (2007), who interviewed 12 Pro-Vice-Chancellors, those who are second in command, it was found that “for most of the respondents, leadership equated to academic leadership. It involved being seen and respected as a member of the academic community. It was a most particular type of leadership, and one in which outsiders might struggle to understand” (p. 414).

After a comprehensive exploration of the leadership theories and models within higher education, Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) classified the theories into the following six categories: trait theories, power and influence theories, behavioral theories, contingency theories, cultural and symbolic theories, and cognitive theories. Although the literature suggests “alternative leadership styles are replacing the traditionally held definitions of leadership and provide new and different (and possibly superior) ways to understand leadership” (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006, p. 6), the changing of leadership styles is relevant to the impact that different generations have on higher education.

## **Millennials in the Classroom**

At this point in time, Millennials make up the traditional undergraduate students in higher education. Millennials are the most educationally ambitious generation ever (Sax, 2003). With one in five Millennials having at least one immigrant parent, this generation is both racially and ethnically the most diverse generation (McGlynn, 2005). Ambitious and achieving are two of the primary characteristics associated with Millennials (DeBard, 2004). Coomes and DeBard (2004) noted “like their GI generational grandparents, members of the Millennial generation may have what Frank D. Roosevelt called a ‘rendezvous with destiny.’” As the next “Great Generation,” Millennials are often compared to the GI Generation in that they will have an important impact on society. In the Strauss and Howe generational theory (1991), Millennials are labeled as a dominant “civic” generation. Members of such a generation:

Grow up as increasingly protected youth [who] will come of age during a secular crisis [for example, the War on Terrorism], will unite into a heroic and achieving cadre of rising adults, will build institutions as powerful as midlifers and emerge as busy elders attacked by the next spiritual awakening (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 74).

In describing Millennials, Strauss and Howe (2000) identified seven key traits of this generation—special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured and conventional. Millennial students feel the pressure to succeed within the classroom and in the workforce more than any other generation (DeBard, 2004). Baby Boomer and Xer

parents, looking for validation for good parenting, have pushed their Millennial children to perform at least, and excel at best (DeBard, 2004). These contemporary young adults are optimistic about their future prospects and have big plans for their careers (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Millennials were raised in structured environments with life direction, resulting in both a trust and reliance on authority (DeBard, 2004). Thus far, Millennials have not considered social responsibility to be the driving force in their life, but “this is the generation willing to pay more for a product if they know the investment is going to a good cause” (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010, p. 289). Millennials desire meaningful work, therefore are expected to be the first generation to be socially active since the 1960s (Sessa et al., 2007).

# CHAPTER III

## LEADERSHIP EDUCATORS' PREFERRED LEADERSHIP TRAITS IN EFFECTIVE LEADERS: A LOOK AT BABY BOOMERS AND XERS

### **Introduction**

Within higher education, diversity continues to grow and drastically change demographics, including ethnicity, religion, and age. This change of demographics extends to both faculty members and student populations. Though universities emphasize the understanding and acceptance of diversity, generational diversity is a factor that does not receive as much attention. With the Millennial generation's coming of age, it is possible for up to four different generations to be present in the realm of academia. Faculty must not only deal with generational diversity among their colleagues, but also among their students.

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Faculty must learn to leverage generational differences among both colleagues and students to create a cohesive environment of understanding and collaborate more effectively.

Although studies show the usefulness in understanding and taking advantage of generational differences, there are many misconceptions about generations that keep leaders and even researchers from further exploring the differences in generations. The main misconception is the belief that “people change their values, attitudes, and preferences as a function of age” (Arsenault, 2004, p. 125). However, research has found that generation’s preferences are life-long effects and do not change based on age alone (Schewe & Meredith, 1994). Lack of empirical research that validates generational differences has led to misunderstandings and a lack of appreciation for these differences. Increasing the amount of research dedicated to understanding the differences in leadership preferences among generations in higher education will aid faculty in dealing with other faculty members and in the classroom with their students.

This study will identify common preferred leadership traits of leadership education faculty belonging to the Baby Boomer and X generations and determine if a relationship between their preferences and their generation exist. This study will answer the following research question – utilizing the Generational Differences in Leadership Questionnaire (GDLQ), how do Baby Boomer and X generations of leadership education faculty rank characteristics of effective leaders?



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After a comprehensive exploration of the leadership theories and models within higher education, Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) classified the theories into the following six categories: trait theories, power and influence theories, behavioral theories, contingency theories, cultural and symbolic theories, and cognitive theories. Although, the literature suggests “alternative leadership styles are replacing the traditionally held definitions of leadership and provide new and different (and possibly superior) ways to understand leadership” (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006, p. 6), the changing of leadership styles is relevant to the impact that different generations have on higher education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Generational Cohort Theory is based on people of the same age group experiencing similar social and historical events that bring them together over time, distinguishing one cohort from another (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). Generational Cohort Theory is defined by social change, rather than biological, and there are six characteristics that help determine the scope of a generation:

(a) a traumatic or formative event such as a war, (b) a dramatic shift in demography that influences the distribution of resources in a society, (c) an interval that connects a generation to success or failure (e.g., the Great Depression), (d) the creation of a ‘sacred space’ that sustains a collective memory (e.g., Woodstock), (e) mentors or heroes that give impetus and voice by their work (e.g., Martin Luther King), and (f) the work of people who know and support each other (e.g., Bill Gates, Steven Jobs)” (Sessa et al., 2007, p. 49).

## **Methods**

The study was descriptive in nature in that “determined specific characteristics of a group...by asking the same sets of questions to a large number of individuals” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 12). Specifically, the researcher utilized an online survey to collect the data. The population for this study was faculty members from across in the country in leadership education. Members of the Association of Leadership Educators (ALE) were used as the sample to represent the population of leadership educators in higher education.

An online survey was created using Qualtrics, an online survey builder and data collector. A link to the survey was then emailed to the ALE listserv of 320 member email addresses. The first round of emails was sent on May 2, 2013. To ensure a higher response rate, Dillman’s (2000) Suggested Design Methods was used for data collection. After the initial contact, nonrespondents were contacted three subsequent times asking for participation in this study. The reminder emails were sent on May 10, May 20, and again on September 9.

## **Instrumentation**

The Generational Differences in Leadership Questionnaire is a modified version of Kouzes and Posner’s Checklist of Admired Leaders. Respondents rank ordered from 1 to 10 the leadership characteristics that are most to least important in an effective leader.

For the purpose of this study, an effective leader is defined as someone that has the ability to influence a group of individuals towards the achievement of a particular goal (Drouillard & Kleiner, 1996; Kotter, 1990; Montgomery, 1961; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1961). Respondents then rank ordered from 1 to 10 the leadership characteristics most often perceived in their undergraduate students. The leadership characteristics were developed based on Kouzes and Posner's empirical work of over 2,500 profit and nonprofit executives and managers by asking them what personal characteristics they looked for or admired in their superiors (Pierce & Newstrom, 2000). This work has been validated for over 20 years in the United States and abroad and is the foundation of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The ten most mentioned characteristics serve as the basis for this instrument. The characteristics are: ambitious, caring, competence, determination, forward-looking, honesty, imagination, inspiration, loyalty, and self-control. In addition to, respondents were asked the following basic demographic questions – year of birth, gender, rank (professor, assistant professor, etc.), and department. No personally identifying information was collected. The validity of this instrument is based on face-value by having experts in the field of study examine the leadership traits used in the questionnaire (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data were collected and stored on the password-protected Qualtrics website. One week after the final reminder email was sent out, the data were downloaded from

Qualtrics into SPSS Statistics for analysis. Of the 320 possible respondents, 91 responses were recorded for a response rate of 28.44%. Incomplete responses and those not in the Baby Boomer and X generation were then eliminated from the data set, leaving 57 responses. This decreased the response rate to 17.81%.

To test for nonresponse error, respondents were grouped as early or late respondents. Miller and Smith (1983) state that “late respondents are statically compared to early respondents using the evaluation data to justify generalizing from the respondents to the sample” (p. 48). The two groups were compared on their responses using t-tests. No differences were found between the late respondents so the results are generalizable to the target population. The researcher then separated those responses into Baby Boomers and Xers, with 21 and 36 responses respectively.

Due to the low response rate, the data were replicated to ensure a sound study of at least 30 responses per generational data set. The Bootstrap Method was used on both sets of data to replicate responses and bring the numbers to 40 each. Bootstrapping is described as “an alternative way to estimate standard errors by repeated resampling from a sample” (Vogt, 1999). The name is derived from the phrase, “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps,” meaning to rely on your own resources. In this study, the researcher numbered the responses in each data set. Then a random number generator for research and students, randomizer.org, was used to generate a list of numbers. The corresponding responses that matched the list of random numbers were then replicated. To get a total



of 40 responses for each data set, 21 responses were replicated for the Baby Boomers and four responses for the Xers.

Once the replication was finished, the researcher ran descriptive statistics and frequencies on both sets of data. The data was then analyzed to determine if a relationship existed between generations and perceived leadership traits. The data was also analyzed to determine if a relationship exists between generations and perceived leadership traits of undergraduate students.

### **Findings**

Of the 57 initial responses, 35 respondents were female and 22 were male. The rank of respondents are as follows – graduate student (7); lecturer (8); associate professor (11); assistant professor (12); professor (6); assistant/associate dean (4); dean/director (8).

Baby Boomers and Xers were asked to rank leadership traits based on their preference in an effective leader. The top three preferred leadership traits selected by Baby Boomers include honest (2.42), competent (3.9), and inspiring (4.15). The top three traits selected by Xers include competent (3.55), honest (3.7), and inspiring (4.5). Though both generations agree on the top three leadership traits, it is interesting to note the Baby Boomers agreed on honesty much more soundly. Tables 1 and 2 list the complete trait rankings by mean for Baby Boomers and Xers.

Table 1

Baby Boomers Preferred Leadership Traits in Effective Leaders (n=40)

<b>Leadership</b>			
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Trait</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
1	Honest	2.43	2.32
2	Competent	3.90	2.18
3	Inspiring	4.15	2.19
4	Forward-looking	4.83	2.72
5	Caring	5.20	2.52
6	Determined	6.18	2.30
7	Self-controlled	6.33	2.79
8	Imaginative	6.70	2.04
9	Loyal	6.78	1.94
10	Ambitious	8.53	2.55

Note: 1 = Most important, 10 = Least Important

Table 2

Xers Preferred Leadership Traits in Effective Leaders (n=40)

<b>Leadership</b>			
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Trait</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
1	Competent	3.55	2.15
2	Honest	3.70	2.94
3	Inspiring	4.50	2.42
4	Forward-looking	4.55	2.61
5	Caring	4.98	2.69
6	Determined	6.00	1.99
7	Imaginative	6.58	2.52
8	Ambitious	6.75	3.19
9	Self-controlled	7.18	2.57
10	Loyal	7.23	2.43

Note: 1 = Most Important, 10 = Least Important

## **Limitations**

The major limitation of this study was the low response rate of 17.81%. Response rate is a critical concern for scholars who seek dependable, valid and reliable results (Hair, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2007; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill; 2006). The low response rate was a result of time of year of data collection. Data collection began at the end of spring semester and continued through summer. During this time of year, many faculty members are out of the office. The last reminder email containing the survey was sent a week after the start of fall semester at a more opportune time to increase the number of responses. Unfortunately, the number of responses remained low.

Another limitation of this study was the use of self-reported data. Caution must always be shown when using self-reported data. My sample was limited to the Association of Leadership Educators and although these members are from across the country, it is still only a small sample of the larger population of leadership educators. The survey was also sent out by email and there is no way to actually track whether or not the respondent is the leadership educator that the email address belongs to.

## **Conclusions**

Several conclusions can be drawn from the results of this study that will add to the overall understanding of generational differences in perceptions of effective leaders. The first interesting result to note is that the X generation did not select honest as the most important leadership trait. This result differs from all previous research where

honesty was found to be the most important leadership trait across all generations (Arsenault, 2004; Sessa, et al., 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Zemke et al, 2000). This is especially interesting since the respondents are leadership educators. These respondents are experts in the field of leadership studies, therefore have experience in leadership behaviors and theories. As a leadership educator with a background in theory, does that change perspectives on the importance of honesty? Xers placing honesty second may also stem from the cynical and untrusting nature of the generation. Research shows that there is a declining level of trust in the X generation and that trust is an essential component of honesty (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). This could explain why Xers in this study ranked honesty as second the most important trait.

Research has also found that Xers prefer a straightforward and competent style of leadership (Arsenault, 2004; Conger, 2001; & Zemke et al., 2000), which matches this study's results in that competent was the most preferred leadership trait on average by Xers. Past studies have also found that loyalty usually ranks high in priority among all generations (Arsenault, 2004), but in this study loyal ranked ninth with Baby Boomers and tenth with Xers.

Smola and Sutton (2002) found that compared to Baby Boomers, Xers wanted to be promoted more quickly. Xers also felt that working hard is an indication of one's worth. In another study, Arsenault (2004) found that Xers ranked ambition as more important

than Baby Boomers. Similarly, this study found that Xers weighted ambitiousness more than their older counterparts, which matches past research.

It should be noted that most of the past generational research has been conducted on for-profit executive level leadership, such as CEOs, managers, and supervisors. In this study, the population was leadership educators. This study supports that there may be a major difference in leadership preference between private industry professionals and faculty in academia. It supports Spendlove's(2007) findings "thus, academic leadership may be fundamentally different to business leadership, and require particular competencies and experience" (p. 414). In this study, leadership educators find loyalty and ambitiousness less important than the executive level leadership of previous studies (Arsenault, 2004).

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended to that further research examine the "why" behind the rankings. With this study, leadership educators ranked the traits based on preference of importance, but knowing why the respondents ranked the traits the way they did would add value to the argument for generational differences. A future study could also utilize a Likert Scale to measure importance of leadership traits. Measuring how important respondents believe each leadership trait to be would add another dimension to the findings of this study. Adding open-ended questions, such as "what other traits should be on the list?" would

also give researchers further data about what leadership traits are important to each generation.

It is also recommended that further research focus on generational leadership preferences in the field of academia, especially leadership education. Leadership educators study leadership as a profession and are responsible for teaching leadership theories and behaviors to students, yet there is little research that examines these educators' personal opinions on effective leaders. It is important for research to shed light onto these personal opinions, because the results of this study indicate that leadership educators may not place value on the same leadership traits that those in the private industry do. This research should include an in-depth look at why respondents rate leadership traits in a particular order. This would help clarify differences in ranking.

With discrepancies in the Xers ranking of honesty, it is also suggested that further research be conducted to investigate the value this generation places on honesty. Past research (Arsenault, 2004) has found that honesty is the most important leadership trait across all generations, yet this study found that it is the second most important trait to generation X. Loyalty is another trait that research has found Baby Boomers and Xers believe to be highly important. However, in this study loyalty ranked ninth and ten for Baby Boomers and Xers respectively. This is a major inconsistency with what research has shown, therefore should be further researched to better understand if loyalty is indeed a trait that is no longer regarded as important in an effective leader.

Beyond generational differences in leadership preferences, this study indicates that further research should include finding out why members of the Association of Leadership Educators did not respond to the survey. Is a low response consistent among other agricultural leadership, education, and communications associations? Leadership education is relatively new area of study with very little research its faculty members. Though leadership education wants research in the field, leadership educators must first participate in research. Leadership educators must refrain from only being consumers of research, but also be providers of researchers too.

CHAPTER IV  
LEADERSHIP EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP  
TRAITS

**Introduction**

The Pew Research Center (2010) found that in 2010, there were 55.4 million Millennials in the United States population and 39% of those Millennials were still in college, high school, or a trade school. “So far only about one-in-five Millennials (19%) are college graduates. An additional 26% are currently in school and plan to graduate from college, while an additional 30% are not in school but expect to someday earn a college degree” (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 41). “The changing demographics of the U.S. population (and of other nations) has quietly but profoundly begun to pull higher education in different directions and to cause the introduction of new academic programs, practices, and personnel policies” (Keller, 2001, p. 234). This changing of demographics among educators and student populations creates uncharted territory for educators to learn how to best engage and interact with students of a younger generation. It is evident that faculty have several years left with the Millennial generation, which means understanding this generation and their behaviors is of utmost importance.

Another consideration for faculty is Millennials are not just in the classroom anymore. With the median age of those receiving a doctorate at 33, “today’s Millennial students – whether possessed of greatness, distracted, narcissistic, or none-of-the-above – will



shortly be tomorrow's colleagues in the teaching profession itself" (Wilson & Gerber, 2008, p. 40). The first college graduates of this generation completed college in 2003 and are now showing up on campuses in administrative ranks, entry-level positions, and as faculty members (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). The Millennials that are being taught right now will soon be the leadership professionals that educators will collaborate with in the future. These demographics suggest the importance of understanding what leadership traits Millennials will bring to the table in both the classroom and the workplace.

This study attempts to identify leadership traits faculty believe their undergraduate students possess. The study will answer the following research question – utilizing the GDLQ, what leadership characteristics do leadership education faculty identify in their undergraduate students?

### **Millennials in the Classroom**

The youngest generation in higher education is the Millennials, also known as the Nexters or Gen Y, born from 1981-2000. This generation values optimism, civic duty, confidence, achievement and their defining moments include 9/11, Oklahoma City bombing, and computers (Arsenault, 2004). At this point in time, Millennials make up the traditional undergraduate students in higher education and are the most educationally ambitious generation ever (Sax, 2003). With one in five Millennials having at least one immigrant parent, this generation is both racially and ethnically the most diverse

generation (McGlynn, 2005). Ambitious and achieving are two of the primary characteristics associated with Millennials (DeBard, 2004).

Coomes and DeBard (2004) noted “like their GI generational grandparents, members of the Millennial generation may have what Frank D. Roosevelt called a ‘rendezvous with destiny.’” As the next “Great Generation,” Millennials are often compared to the GI Generation in that they will have an important impact on society. In the Strauss and Howe generational theory (1991), Millennials are labeled as a dominant “civic” generation. Members of such a generation:

Grow up as increasingly protected youth [who] will come of age during a secular crisis [for example, the War on Terrorism], will unite into a heroic and achieving cadre of rising adults, will build institutions as powerful as midlifers and emerge as busy elders attacked by the next spiritual awakening (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 74).

In describing Millennials, Strauss and Howe (2000) identified seven key traits of this generation—special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured and conventional. Millennial students feel the pressure to succeed within the classroom and in the workforce more than any other generation (DeBard, 2004). Baby Boomer and Xer parents, looking for validation for good parenting, have pushed their Millennial children to “perform at least, and excel at best” (DeBard, 2004, p. 38). These contemporary young adults are optimistic about their future prospects and have big plans for their

careers (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Thus far, Millennials have not considered social responsibility to be the driving force in their life, but “this is the generation willing to pay more for a product if they know the investment is going to a good cause” (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010, p. 289). Millennials desire meaningful work, therefore are expected to be the first generation to be socially active since the 1960s (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal & Brown, 2007). Millennials were raised in structured environments with life direction, resulting in both a trust and reliance on authority (DeBard, 2004).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Judge, Piccolo, and Kosalka (2009) state that “the leader trait perspective is perhaps the most venerable intellectual tradition in leadership research” (p. 855). In this study, Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) Checklist of Admired Leaders was utilized to gauge leadership educators’ perceptions of the leadership traits demonstrated by their students. They have developed a list of the ten most popular leadership traits by administering questionnaires to over 75,000 people around the globe. “The results of these surveys have been striking in their regularity over the years...Only four [characteristics] have continuously received over 50% of the votes” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 24). These four traits include honest, forward-looking, competent, and inspiring. For this study, the checklist with the ten traits most popular leadership traits is used (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The Checklist of Admired Leaders contains the following traits – ambitious, caring, competent, determined, forward-looking, honest, imaginative, inspiring, loyal, and self-controlled. These ten leadership traits are recognized as the characteristics that

people “most for look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction they would willingly follow” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 24).

### **Methods**

In this descriptive study, the researcher utilized an online survey to collect data from faculty across the country. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) state, “the purpose of surveys is to describe certain characteristics of a population” (p. G-3). In this study, leadership educators in higher education served as the population with members of the Association of Leadership Educators (ALE) used as the sample.

An online survey was created using Qualtrics, an online survey builder and data collector. A link to the survey was then emailed to the ALE listserv of 320 member email addresses. The first round of emails was sent on May 2, 2013. To ensure a higher response rate, Dillman’s (2000) Suggested Design Methods were used for data collection. After the initial contact, nonrespondents were contacted three subsequent times asking for participation in this study. The reminder emails were sent on May 10, May 20, and again on September 9.

### **Instrumentation**

The Generational Differences in Leadership Questionnaire used in this study is a modified version of Kouzes and Posner’s Checklist of Admired Leaders. Respondents rank ordered from 1 to 10 the leadership characteristics that are most to least important

in an effective leader. For the purpose of this study, an effective leader is defined as someone that has the ability to influence a group of individuals towards the achievement of a particular goal (Drouillard & Kleiner, 1996; Kotter, 1990; Montgomery, 1961; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1961). Respondents then rank ordered from 1 to 10 the leadership characteristics most often perceived in their undergraduate students. The leadership characteristics were developed based on Kouzes and Posner's empirical work of over 2,500 profit and nonprofit executives and managers by asking them what personal characteristics they looked for or admired in their superiors (Pierce & Newstrom, 2000). This work has been validated for over 20 years in the United States and abroad and is the foundation of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The ten most mentioned characteristics serve as the basis for this instrument. The characteristics are: ambitious, caring, competence, determination, forward-looking, honesty, imagination, inspiration, loyalty, and self-controlled. In addition to, respondents were asked the following basic demographic questions – year of birth, gender, rank (professor, assistant professor, etc.), and department. ). No personally identifying information was collected. The validity of this instrument is based on face-value by having experts in the field of study examine the leadership traits used in the questionnaire (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data were collected and stored on the password-protected Qualtrics website. One week after the final reminder email was sent out, the data were downloaded from

Qualtrics into SPSS Statistics for analysis. Of the 320 possible respondents, 91 responses were recorded for a response rate of 28.44%. Incomplete responses were then eliminated from the data set, leaving 57 responses and a response rate of 17.81%. To test for nonresponse error, respondents were grouped as early or late respondents. Miller and Smith (1983) state that “late respondents are statically compared to early respondents using the evaluation data to justify generalizing from the respondents to the sample” (p. 48). The two groups were compared on their responses using t-tests. No differences were found between the late respondents making the results generalizable to the population of leadership educators in higher education.

### **Findings**

Of the 57 responses, 35 respondents were female and 22 were male. The rank of respondents are as follows – graduate student (7); lecturer (8); associate professor (11); assistant professor (12); professor (6); assistant/associate dean (4); dean/director (8).

The means of the ten leadership traits in the survey range from 4.07-7.91. Overall, leadership educators recognize that their students are determined (4.07), ambitious (4.16), and honest (4.35). The least prevalent leadership traits leadership educators acknowledged in their students was self-controlled (7.91), inspiring (6.89), and forward-looking (6.65). Table 3 lists the complete rankings of the perceptions of students’ leadership traits.

Table 3

Leadership Educators' Perceptions of  
Students' Leadership Traits n=57

<b>Leadership</b>			
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Trait</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
1	Determined	4.07	2.41
2	Ambitious	4.16	3.00
3	Honest	4.35	2.68
4	Caring	4.48	2.56
5	Competent	4.90	2.34
6	Loyal	5.58	2.88
7	Imaginative	6.02	2.73
	Forward-		
8	Looking	6.65	2.67
9	Inspiring	6.89	2.49
10	Self-controlled	7.91	2.21

Note: 1 = Most Prevalent, 10 = Least Prevalent

### **Limitations**

The major limitation of this study was the low response rate of 17.81%. Response rate is a critical concern for scholars who seek dependable, valid and reliable results (Hair, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2007; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill; 2006). The low response rate was a result of time of year of data collection. Data collection began at the end of spring semester and continued through summer. During this time of year, many faculty members are out of the office. The last reminder email containing the survey was sent a week after the start of fall semester at a more opportune time to increase the number of responses. Unfortunately, the number of responses remained low.

Another limitation of this study was the use of self-reported data. Caution must always be shown when using self-reported data. My sample was limited to the Association of

Leadership Educators and although these members are from across the country, it is still only a small sample of the larger population of leadership educators. The survey was also sent out by email and there is no way to actually track whether or not the respondent is the leadership educator that the email address belongs to.

### **Conclusions**

The leadership educators in this study view their students, most of which are Millennials, as determined and ambitious. These leadership traits match what research has described as a generation focused on achieving a solid and rewarding career (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). The Millennial students in today's classroom feel the pressure to succeed more than any other generation of the past (DeBard, 2004). This could explain the determination and ambitiousness educators see in their students. However, respondents only ranked their students' competency as the fifth most prevalent trait. Although Millennials are seen as determined and ambitious, if this generation lacks competency, it could be they expect more than they are prepared for. It is also possible that leadership educators ranked Millennials fifth in competency because they are still young as a generation and competency comes through maturation. Research shows that work attitudes, values, and satisfaction can change as workers pass through career stages (Rhodes, 1983; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Competency is a trait that the Millennial generation could further develop as it matures.



Millennials have been labeled as entitled and expectant of rapid career advancement, yet research shows they have realistic expectations about their future (Ng et al., 2010).

While some educators may see the determination and ambition of this generation as power-hungry and entitled, it is their Baby Boomer and Xer parents that have pushed this generation “to perform at least, and excel at best” (Debard, 2004, p. 38). Research has found Millennials want their leaders to exhibit dedication (Arsenault, 2004; Sessa et al. 2007). Millennials are displaying the same leadership traits in themselves as they respect in their leaders.

Another noteworthy result is the ranking of caring as a leadership trait. As the next great generation with an emphasis on social work, it would be expected that these students would be perceived as more caring by their educators. Past studies indicate that although Millennials do not consider social responsibility as the most important lifestyle component, they do believe in supporting good causes and have expressed a genuine interest in social issues, such as the environment (Ng et al., 2010). Because this generation has shown at least some interest in social responsibility and are seen as caring by their educators, it could be that it is still too early for this generation to have definable social contributions.

One should also remember that the students in this study are likely to have a connection to leadership coursework, considering the respondents are leadership educators. This

brings to question whether there is a difference in students directly educated in leadership theory and the overall Millennial generation.

When categorizing students as the Millennial generation, it is important to remember Strauss and Howe (2002) developed their theory based on big-picture historical and cultural events. As Coomes and DeBard (2004) point out, “the big picture seldom contains images of marginalized groups. It is uncertain how effectively the generational perspective can be applied to students of color, LGBT students, and students of specific ethnic and cultural groups” (p. 14).

Time does not stand still. The Millennials that are in today’s classroom will be tomorrow’s leaders. Some Millennials are already hold leadership positions. It is important for Baby Boomers and Xers to understand the Millennial generation’s leadership values, because Millennials can be both followers and a bosses in the workforce. In working with Millennials, remember that they want to be valued as a member of the organization. This is also applicable to the Millennials in the classroom. Baby Boomers and Xers must recognize that Millennials are a crucial part of the workforce and learning how to lead them as well as follow them will be critical to the success of both businesses and higher education.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that future research focus on the Millennial generation's perceived leadership traits, such as determination and ambition, and the impact on actual output, such as competency. Research should investigate if a connection exists between the perception of determination and ambition and the perception of entitlement among Millennials. In the future, research should investigate if the low ranking of competency is based on the youngness of this generation and if competency increases as a function of maturation.

Future research should also include the actual civic tendencies of Millennials and their impact on social change. It has been said that has the next "Great Generation," Millennials are committed to social responsibility, but the research supporting this civic-mindedness is lacking.

It is recommended that another study compare leadership educators' perceptions of their students to students of previous generations. It would be interesting to note the differences between the Millennial generation of students compared to the Xer or Baby Boomer generation of students. Further research should also include the "why" behind the ranking of leadership traits. This study ranked the prevalence of leadership traits exhibited by their student, but did not gauge why leadership educators ranked the traits the way they did. Open-ended questions or a Likert Scale would help gather data to support the perceptions of leadership educators.

Lastly, further research should include the effect LGBT, ethnic, and culturally diverse students have on generational theory. As student population demographics are rapidly evolving, it is important that our generational research evolve too so.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

With up to four different generations in higher education, it is important to recognize the differences educators of different generations have in perceptions of leadership and the leadership traits of the students these educators teach. The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Utilizing the Generational Differences in Leadership Questionnaire (GDLQ), how do Baby Boomer and X generations of leadership educators rank characteristics of effective leaders?
2. Utilizing the GDLQ, what leadership characteristics do leadership educators identify in their undergraduate students?

Of the 57 responses, 35 respondents were female and 22 were male. The rank of respondents are as follows – graduate student (7); lecturer (8); associate professor (11); assistant professor (12); professor (6); assistant/associate dean (4); dean/director (8).

To answer research question one, Baby Boomers and Xers were asked to rank leadership traits based on their preference in an effective leader. The top three preferred leadership traits selected by Baby Boomers include honest (2.42), competent (3.9), and inspiring (4.15). The top three traits selected by Xers include competent (3.55), honest (3.7), and

inspiring (4.5). Though both generations agree on the top three leadership traits, it is interesting to note the Baby Boomers agreed on honesty much more soundly.

To answer research question two, the same leadership educators were asked to rank the leadership traits in order of prevalence exhibited by their students. The means of the ten leadership traits in the survey range from 4.07-7.91. Overall, leadership educators recognize that their students are determined (4.07), ambitious (4.16), and honest (4.35). The least prevalent leadership traits leadership educators acknowledged in their students was self-controlled (7.91), inspiring (6.89), and forward-looking (6.65).

## **Conclusions**

### *Article I*

Several conclusions can be drawn from the results of this study that will add to the overall understanding of generational differences in perceptions of effective leaders. The first interesting result to note is that the X generation did not select honest as the most important leadership trait. This result differs from all previous research where honesty was found to be the most important leadership trait across all generations (Arsenault, 2004; Sessa, et al., 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Zemke et al, 2000). This is especially interesting since the respondents are leadership educators. These respondents are experts in the field of leadership studies, therefore have experience in leadership behaviors and theories. As a leadership educator with a background in theory, does that change perspectives on the importance of honesty? Xers placing

honesty second may also stem from the cynical and untrusting nature of the generation. Research shows that there is a declining level of trust in the X generation and that trust is an essential component of honesty (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). This could explain why Xers in this study ranked honesty as second the most important trait.

Research has also found that Xers prefer a straightforward and competent style of leadership (Arsenault, 2004; Conger, 2001; & Zemke et al., 2000), which matches this study's results in that competent was the most preferred leadership trait on average by Xers. Past studies have also found that loyalty usually ranks high in priority among all generations (Arsenault, 2004), but in this study loyal ranked ninth with Baby Boomers and tenth with Xers.

Smola and Sutton (2002) found that compared to Baby Boomers, Xers wanted to be promoted more quickly. Xers also felt that working hard is an indication of one's worth. In another study, Arsenault (2004) found that Xers ranked ambition as more important than Baby Boomers. Similarly, this study found that Xers weighted ambitiousness more than their older counterparts, which matches past research.

It should be noted that most of the past generational research has been conducted on for-profit executive level leadership, such as CEOs, managers, and supervisors. In this study, the population was leadership educators. This study proves that there may be a major difference in leadership preference between private industry professionals and

faculty in academia. In this study, leadership educators find loyalty and ambitiousness less important than the executive level leadership of previous studies (Arsenault, 2004).

## *Article II*

The leadership educators in this study view their students, most of which are Millennials, as determined and ambitious. These leadership traits match what research has described as a generation focused on achieving a solid and rewarding career (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). The Millennial students in today's classroom feel the pressure to succeed more than any other generation of the past (DeBard, 2004). This could explain the determination and ambitiousness educators see in their students. However, respondents only ranked their students' competency as the fifth most prevalent trait. Although Millennials are seen as determined and ambitious, if this generation lacks competency, it could be they expect more than they are prepared for. Research shows that work attitudes, values, and satisfaction can change as workers pass through career stages (Rhodes, 1983; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Competency is a trait that the Millennial generation could further develop as it matures.

Millennials have been labeled as entitled and expectant of rapid career advancement, yet research shows they have realistic expectations about their future (Ng et al., 2010).

While some educators may see the determination and ambition of this generation as power-hungry and entitled, it is their Baby Boomer and Xer parents that have pushed this generation "to perform at least, and excel at best" (Debard, 2004, p. 38). Research



has found Millennials want their leaders to exhibit dedication (Arsenault, 2004; Sess et al. 2007). Millennials are displaying the same leadership traits in themselves as they respect in their leaders.

Another noteworthy result is the ranking of caring as a leadership trait. As the next great generation with an emphasis on social work, it would be expected that these students would be perceived as more caring by their educators. Past studies indicate that although Millennials do not consider social responsibility as the most important lifestyle component, they do believe in supporting good causes and have expressed a genuine interest in social issues, such as the environment (Ng et al., 2010). Because this generation has shown at least some interest in social responsibility and are seen as caring by their educators, it could be that it is still too early for this generation to have definable social contributions.

One should also remember that the students in this study are likely to have a connection to leadership coursework, considering the respondents are leadership educators. This brings to question whether there is a difference in students directly educated in leadership theory and the overall Millennial generation.

When categorizing students as the Millennial generation, it is important to remember Strauss and Howe (2002) developed their theory based on big-picture historical and cultural events. As Coomes and DeBard (2004) point out, “the big picture seldom

contains images of marginalized groups. It is uncertain how effectively the generational perspective can be applied to students of color, LGBT students, and students of specific ethnic and cultural groups” (p. 14).

Time does not stand still. The Millennials that are in today’s classroom will be tomorrow’s leaders. Some Millennials are already hold leadership positions. It is important for Baby Boomers and Xers to understand the Millennial generation’s leadership values, because Millennials can be both followers and a bosses in the workforce. In working with Millennials, remember that they want to be valued as a member of the organization. This is also applicable to the Millennials in the classroom. Baby Boomers and Xers must recognize that Millennials are a crucial part of the workforce and learning how to lead them as well as follow them will be critical to the success of both businesses and higher education.

#### *Comparison of Both Articles*

In comparing the results of both research questions, an interesting result was the Baby Boomer and Xer emphasis on honesty, competency, and the ability to inspire as the most important leadership traits for effective leaders, yet the same respondents did not recognize these leadership traits as the most prevalent in their students. In fact, leadership educators ranked their students’ leadership traits as third for honest, fifth for competent, and ninth for inspiring. In this study, it appears that Baby Boomer and X

generations do not view the Millennial generation of students to have the leadership traits of effective leaders.

Though Baby Boomers and Xers rank loyal as ninth and tenth respectively in terms of importance, they ranked loyalty in their students as sixth. This is surprising because research has branded the Millennial generation as less loyal, especially to their jobs (Sessa et al., 2007). If this study would have followed past research trends, Millennial students would have had a lower ranking in loyalty.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended to that further research examine the “why” behind the rankings. With this study, leadership educators ranked the traits based on preference of importance, but knowing why the respondents ranked the traits the way they did would add value to the argument for generational differences. A future study could also utilize a Likert Scale to measure importance of leadership traits. Measuring how important respondents believe each leadership trait to be would add another dimension to the findings of this study. Adding open-ended questions, such as “what other traits should be on the list?” would also give researchers further data about what leadership traits are important to each generation.

It is also recommended that further research focus on generational leadership preferences in the field of academia, especially leadership education. Leadership educators study

leadership as a profession and are responsible for teaching leadership theories and behaviors to students, yet there is little research that examines these educators' personal opinions on effective leaders. It is important for research to shed light onto these personal opinions, because the results of this study indicate that leadership educators may not place value on the same leadership traits that those in the private industry do. This research should include an in-depth look at why respondents rate leadership traits in a particular order. This would help clarify differences in ranking.

With discrepancies in the Xers ranking of honesty, it is also suggested that further research be conducted to investigate the value this generation places on honesty. Past research (Arsenault, 2004) has found that honesty is the most important leadership trait across all generations, yet this study found that it is the second most important trait to generation X. Loyalty is another trait that research has found Baby Boomers and Xers believe to be highly important. However, in this study loyalty ranked ninth and tenth for Baby Boomers and Xers respectively. This is a major inconsistency with what research has shown, therefore should be further researched to better understand if loyalty is indeed a trait that is no longer regarded as important in an effective leader.

Another area of focus for future research is the Millennial generation's perceived leadership traits, such as determination and ambition, and the impact on actual output, such as competency. Research should investigate if a connection exists between the perception of determination and ambition and the perception of entitlement among

Millennials. In the future, research should investigate if the low ranking of competency is based on the youngness of this generation and if competency increases as a function of maturation.

Future research should also include the actual civic tendencies of Millennials and their impact on social change. It has been said that has the next “Great Generation,” Millennials are committed to social responsibility, but the research supporting this civic-mindedness is lacking. Lastly, further research should include the effect LGBT, ethnic, and culturally diverse students have on generational theory. As student population demographics are rapidly evolving, it is important that our generational research evolve too so.

It is recommended that another study compare leadership educators’ perceptions of their students to students of previous generations. It would be interesting to note the differences between the Millennial generation of students compared to the Xer or Baby Boomer generation of students. Further research should also include the “why” behind the ranking of leadership traits. This study ranked the prevalence of leadership traits exhibited by their student, but did not gauge why leadership educators ranked the traits the way they did. Open-ended questions or a Likert Scale would help gather data to support the perceptions of leadership educators.

Beyond generational differences in leadership preferences, this study indicates that further research should include finding out why members of the Association of Leadership Educators did not respond to the survey. Is a low response consistent among other agricultural leadership, education, and communications associations? Leadership education is relatively new area of study with very little research its faculty members. Though leadership education wants research in the field, leadership educators must first participate in research. Leadership educators must refrain from only being consumers of research, but also be providers of researchers too.

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